

7. Roaming

No carrier's network covers every square mile of the state or the nation. To offer better coverage, carriers often enter into "roaming" agreements to allow you to complete calls even when your carrier's network is not available. In addition, some carriers offer international roaming so you can use your phone in other countries. Review your calling plan brochure and rate plan map to determine whether roaming will be included in your monthly "bucket" of minutes or if there will be an additional cost. Also, ask the carrier how you will know when you are roaming and whether the services offered on the carrier's network (voicemail, caller identification, etc.) are available while roaming.

8. Long Distance

How long distance calls are charged on your wireless plan will probably be different than what you are used to on your landline phone. Wireless "local" calling areas are generally larger than your home phone. Wireless long distance calls generally include calls made to a location outside of your local calling area. Review your calling plan brochure to determine whether long distance calls are included in the service plan or whether you will be billed an extra per-minute charge for long distance calls.

9. Understand Your Special Features

In addition to offering traditional voice service, many carriers offer additional features or services such as Internet browsing, text messaging, also known as short message service (SMS), or digital photos. If you want these features, it is a good idea to use them during the trial period offered by the carrier. Be sure to ask how billing will apply to the use of

these features. For example, you may be charged by the minute for voice calls, but charged by the file size ("kilobyte") or per message for wireless Internet or text messaging usage.

Another category of minutes is "mobile to mobile." Make sure you understand what mobile telephone numbers you can call using "mobile to mobile" minutes. In addition, some carriers allow you to roll unused minutes over from month to month. Check with the individual carrier to determine whether it offers either of these options and make sure you understand the parameters.

10. Wireless Local Number Portability (WLNP)

In November 2003, many consumers gained the ability to switch wireless carriers while keeping their wireless phone number. This process is called Wireless Local Number Portability, or WLNP.

WLNP initially became available to consumers in the United States' 100 largest metropolitan areas, including Seattle-Bellevue-Everett, Tacoma, and Vancouver. WLNP will be available to consumers in most other parts of the state after May 24, 2004. Here are some tips if you are considering whether to "port" your number to another wireless carrier.

Check to see if you are under contract with your current carrier. If so, you may be obligated to pay an early termination fee for canceling service before the contract expires. You may need to purchase a new phone because most wireless devices are designed for use on a particular carrier's network. It will usually take several hours, and in some instances could take much longer, to have your number ported.

If you call 911 from your new phone while your number is being ported, the emergency

operator may not be able to call you back. Don't hang up until the operator says you can, and call back if you get disconnected. The same advice applies if you call 911 from your old phone once the porting process is complete.

Where to Go for Help

The wireless industry is highly competitive and dynamic. New technologies and services are introduced on a regular basis. If you have questions about your wireless service, or if you have any concerns, **please contact your wireless carrier first.**

You may also contact the following agencies for assistance:

**Washington State
Attorney General's Office**
1-800-551-4636

www.atg.wa.gov/consumer/wireless

**Federal Communications
Commission**
1-888-225-5322
<http://wireless.fcc.gov/>

**Cellular Telecommunications
& Internet Association (CTIA)**
www.wow-com.com
www.easyporting.com



**Ten Things to Know
BEFORE You Buy Wireless
Telephone Service**



Ten Things to Know Before You Buy Wireless Telephone Service

The wireless telephone industry has seen phenomenal growth in recent years. According to industry figures, wireless telephone usage has stretched ten-fold over the last decade and includes approximately half of all Americans. Whether used for business, to keep in touch with friends and family, or as a safety backup, wireless telephones have become an integral tool in many of our lives.

The Washington State Attorney General's Office is actively working with the industry to ensure that customers understand wireless service. As with any technological service, there are many things the customer needs to be aware of when making a selection. That is why, together, we have developed this brochure as a tool for making smart choices in selecting the right wireless service.

We hope the following tips will be useful to you when purchasing wireless telephone service.

1. Read the Calling Plan Brochure and Contract

Wireless carriers usually provide a calling plan brochure and/or a contract when you purchase wireless service. Read the contract (or terms and conditions) and the calling plan brochure so you fully understand this important information. If you have any questions, ask the carrier to clarify.

2. When and Where Do You Want to Use Your Wireless Service?

The primary consideration in choosing a plan is when and where you will be using your phone.

Will you use your phone in the local area or when you travel? Carriers offer a variety of calling plans, such as local, regional, nationwide or coast-to-coast.

Will you use your phone on nights and weekends or predominantly during the day? Many carriers offer calling plans that include one "bucket" of minutes that can be used anytime or at designated peak times during the month and a second bucket that can only be used during nights and weekends or off-peak times. Check with the individual carrier to determine what constitutes nights and weekends or off-peak.

3. Test Your Phone and Features During the Trial Period

Take advantage of the trial periods that most carriers offer to test all the features of the phone as well as your coverage area. Use your phone at home, your office, frequently driven roads, and during the time of day that you generally expect to use your service.

During the trial period, typically 14-30 days, consumers can cancel service without incurring the early termination fee. If you agree to a service commitment of one year or more and cancel after the trial period ends, you will be obligated to pay the early termination fee, so be sure to verify the length of the trial period and any other details on how it works.

Find out whether or not you can return your wireless phone to the carrier during the trial period. Some carriers use authorized agents

that may also require secondary contracts for phones and accessories.

4. Know Your Coverage Area

Coverage area refers to the geographic area in which you should be able to use your wireless phone. Coverage varies with each carrier, but most carriers publish coverage maps. You can obtain these maps by contacting the carrier or coverage maps may be posted on the carrier's website. Be aware that these maps are generally an approximation of coverage area. Actual coverage can vary and is dependent on many factors. Weather, mountains, hills, buildings, network traffic and other factors can adversely affect coverage and network signal strength.

5. Alternatives to a Long-Term Commitment

Consumers have a number of choices when it comes to paying for wireless service. You should check to see what best fits your needs. In lieu of a contract term, like one or two years, and the possibility of an early termination fee, some carriers offer month-to-month options for an additional charge. Another option is for subscribers to use "pay as you go" or "prepaid" wireless services, which do not require long-term contracts and therefore generally do not have an early termination fee. If you choose a prepaid option, make sure you know if and when the minutes you buy will expire.

6. Account for All Wireless Phone Service Costs

Wireless phone service is generally billed differently than your traditional home phone service. Wireless calling plans generally include a "bucket" of minutes per month. Depending on your plan, the "bucket" of minutes included may (or may not) include roaming or long distance charges.

Read your contract and rate plan brochure to understand the charges associated with the plan you are considering. Here are examples of what you should consider before you purchase service:

- **Activation Fees:** Will you be charged a fee to initiate service?
- **Additional Fees:** How much can you expect to pay per month in taxes and regulatory cost recovery fees?
- **Airtime:** Will you be charged for both incoming and outgoing calls?
- **Customer Service:** Will you be charged for calling customer service from your wireless phone?
- **Directory Assistance (e.g. 4-1-1):** Will you be charged for Directory Assistance services?
- **Dropped Calls:** Can you receive a credit for dropped calls?
- **Minute Increments:** Does the carrier bill in whole minute or partial minute increments? When does billing begin and end?
- **Roaming Fees:** Will there be an additional charge for making and receiving calls while outside of your coverage area?
- **Toll-free Numbers:** Will you be billed airtime for toll-free calls?
- **Unanswered Calls:** Will you be charged for unanswered calls?

Be aware that if you exceed the number of minutes included in your plan's monthly base rate, you can expect additional charges. If you purchase a plan in which you share minutes with another customer, be sure you understand how the minutes will be allocated. If you terminate your service prior to the term in your contract you will be charged an early termination fee for each phone on the plan. Carefully review your first bill to make sure you received the correct calling plan and features.